TRIBES

It is abundantly clear that many of the “tribes” so beloved of (even modern) Western commentators are not entities preserved unchanged from ancient times but rather the relatively recent products of intense participation in regional networks of political, social, and economic interaction. “Tribal” and/or ethnic identities have never been primordial and immutable, in Africa or elsewhere, and it is possible in many cases to trace sets of historically and socially contingent processes that have brought these modern identities into being.

In terms of conformity, tribalism may also refer in popular cultural terms to a way of thinking or behaving in which people are loyal to their own tribe or social group. Tribalism has been defined as a ‘way of being’ based upon variable combinations of kinship-based organization, reciprocal exchange, manual production, oral communication and analogical enquiry. Tribalism implies the possession of a strong cultural or ethnic identity that separates one member of a group from the members of another group. Based on strong relations of proximity and kinship, members of a tribe tend to possess a strong feeling of identity. Objectively, for a customary tribal society to form there needs to be ongoing customary organization, enquiry and exchange. However, intense feelings of common identity can lead people to feel tribally connected. Bullying occurs within tribes when a tribal member is unwilling to conform to the politics of the collective.

A heavy sense of patriarchy in many tribes. Status is important within a tribe. A sense of belonging. Like a big family.
1. Zulu

Zulu is unequivocally the most popular tribe in Africa—for a number of good reasons. First, we have the Shakaland, which is acknowledged worldwide as the birth place of the Legendary chief, Shaka Zulu. Secondly, Zulu is also acknowledged for being the largest ethnic group in South Africa, with an estimated population of 11 million people.

2. Maasai

Maasai is the second most popular African tribe after Zulu, and it’s mainly because of its deeply rooted traditions and culture. Even when a great majority of African tribes are adopting a modern lifestyle, Maasais still live in Bomas and nomadically move around with large herds of cattle for a living. They mainly feed on meat, drink raw blood, and can be spotted anywhere in East Africa—especially Kenya—wearing Shukas and exceptional beaded jewels.

3. San Bushmen

If you thought everything in “The gods must be crazy” film was all acted up, then wait until you observe the daily lives of the San Bushmen. To begin with, this is the tribe that consists of people who have inhabited Western Botswana and Makgadikgadi pans for centuries. That’s to say they’ve literally survived living in an arid area, which has no drop of water to be spotted anywhere. And not only do they depend on setting animal traps for feeding, but also feed on tubers and roots. Dressed in loincloths, the tribesmen swing bows and arrows on their shoulders, as they lead the way and factually make tobacco from zebras’ dung.

4. Yoruba

Yoruba is undeniably the largest ethnic group in Africa, with a population estimate at about 35 million people in total. They mainly occupy the South Western sides of Nigeria, as well as Southern Benin, with a great majority coming from Nigeria.
5. Xhosa

All across the Eastern-Cape-Province of South Africa, you are likely to come across millions of people who speak with literal click sounds—the Xhosa people. Actually, Xhosa has a number of sub tribes that encapsulate it: Mpondo, Xesibe, Mpondomise, Thembu, Bhaca and Mfengu, with Mpondo being the most popular among them.

6. Hausa

The Hausa are one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa, as well as the largest in West African. In fact, it's not only a racially diverse ethnic group in Africa, but culturally homogenous as well, encircling the people in the Sudanian and Sahelian areas of South-eastern Niger and Northern Nigeria, with a significant number living in Chad, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, Sudan and Ghana. They have a restricted dress code: elaborate dresses for men with striking embroideries around the neck, and colourful caps commonly referred to as fula. For Hausa women, there's the abaya wrapper, which consists of a colourful wrap cloth, a matching blouse, a shawl and a head tie.

7. Himba

Himba tribe, found in Northern Namibia—Kunene region, is basically made up of seminomadic pastoralists that comprises of approximately 20,000 to 50,000 aboriginals. They are famously known as the "Red People of Africa," since they use red paste called otjize—a mixture of butter and red clay—to paint themselves red. Also noted in their village is the holy fire (Okuruwo), which is continuously kept alive to represent the ancestors who help them mediate with their God, Mukuru.
8. Oromo

The Oromo tribe is made up of people who inhabit the Southern part of Ethiopia, Northern Kenya and some parts of Somalia. It’s considered the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, which accounts for about 35% of Ethiopia’s population. Basically, the Oromos speak Oromo Language—which is considered a Cushitic version of the Afro-Asiatic lingo.

9. Kalenjin

If you’re a serious fan of athletics, then you definitely know a word or two about this African tribe from the Western Highlands of Kenya. Originally, Kalenjins were referred to as the “Nandi speaking tribe” until early 1950s when they officially adopted the name Kalenjin. Since then, the tribe has consistently been giving birth to elite Marathon runners, making it one of the most popular tribes worldwide as far as athletics is concerned.

10. Chaga

Closing the list is the Chaga tribe from Tanzania. Traditionally, this tribe inhabit the Eastern slopes of Mount Meru and Mount Kilimanjaro, and are mainly concentrated around Moshi in Tanzania. In Tanzania, they are regarded as the first tribe to embrace Christianity during the colonial times, which in turn gave them a better access to advanced health care and education in Tanzania.
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